

THE CALGARY
NONPROFIT
INNOVATION
AWARDS

Celebrating creativity, risk and success

“To raise new questions, new possibilities,
to regard old problems from a new angle,
requires creative imagination and marks
real advance.”

— *Albert Einstein*



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**The Canadian Nonprofit
Innovators Network**

Calgary is home to a vital and creative nonprofit sector.

Thousands of organizations provide programs and services to all facets of our community and play an integral part in creating a healthy and sustainable society. Organizations have operated successfully for many years, but as the environment we work in becomes more complex, the need to be innovative is crucial.

Throughout the city, examples of creativity and exploration are everywhere. New models of organizational effectiveness, collaboration and program delivery are cropping up – and taking hold. From well known innovative approaches to a wide variety of smaller-scale shared space and co-location initiatives, there are many examples of innovation at work. Yet, despite a wealth of case studies, there is still much we can learn as we shine a light on promising, yet lesser known, innovations.

And thus, the Calgary Nonprofit Innovation Awards were born. The Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (CCVO) established the awards to celebrate creativity, risk-taking, learning and successful improvements within the sector. The Calgary Nonprofit Innovation Awards are open to all Calgary and area public benefit nonprofits and registered charities and are awarded to organizations which have demonstrated significant innovations that involved taking risks and learning from what works and what doesn't. Our belief is that fostering a culture of innovation involves seeking out, supporting and promoting innovation already underway. From this base, further innovations can flourish.

First, we need to know the good things that are happening. The Calgary Nonprofit Innovation Awards provide a forum to help profile innovative practices that are unknown to us and the broader community. They offer organizations the opportunity to share their ideas and the learnings they've had along the journey. The awards help showcase innovative practices across the sector and provide a measure of financial support to develop these practices even further.

The 2011 Awards

We asked organizations to tell us their stories. Stories of thinking not only outside the box, but of kicking the box to the curb. We were seeking examples of risk-taking, creativity and results. We also wanted to hear stories from organizations that tried something that didn't work as planned, but helped them grow and learn in unexpected ways.

We would like to thank all those who submitted a story. We were overwhelmed with the creativity, passion and openness of the applications. The four winning organizations profiled in this report represent an incredible array of innovative work being carried out by the nonprofit sector in this city.

Our Project Advisory Committee was made up of experienced sector leaders and stakeholders who reviewed dozens of applications from local agencies. The dialogue and deliberations were spirited – both when defining innovation and when determining which submissions deserved to win. Defining and judging innovation – as it turns out – is a very subjective experience.

The groups profiled in the next few pages struck a cord with the Project Advisory Committee and exhibited the following characteristics:

- Innovations that yielded significant benefit to the clients/stakeholders, staff or volunteers.
- Innovations that went “viral” and spread quickly to other areas or organizations.
- Small ideas that had large impacts.
- Projects that didn't work out as planned but led to big learnings.
- Innovations involving partnerships with other groups.

Moving Forward

The nonprofit sector, by its very nature, is innovative. Nonprofit organizations exist to address unmet needs in our community. They exist because, at some point in time, a group of people came together to create a new program, process or system that filled a need not filled by others. For the nonprofit sector, necessity truly is the mother of invention.

As we move forward in this work, CCVO will continue to encourage discovery and dialogue around innovation in order to help organizations deliver their missions. We will share the inspiring stories and encourage increased exploration, creativity and adaptation of clever, innovative practice. We hope you read these stories and think not, "I wish we'd thought of that" but, "how can we build upon it".

*"The things we fear most in organizations
- fluctuations, disturbances, imbalances -
are the primary sources of creativity."*

— Margaret Wheatley



Ad designs by Karo



HomeFront

United in Breaking the Cycle of Domestic Violence

HomeFront is an internationally recognized, research validated, leading edge, coordinated community-justice response to domestic violence. Working together with justice, law enforcement and the community, HomeFront shares a common vision and goal to reduce domestic violence in Calgary.

HomeFront partners with the criminal justice system to respond in an improved and coordinated manner with families experiencing domestic violence.



The Innovation

Thanks to HomeFront, Calgary families are being empowered to live lives free of domestic conflict.

Making services available to people in crisis doesn't mean they'll seek help. While many do, a great many more do not – for a variety of reasons. Fear. Denial. The hope that things will get better. Every year Calgary Police Service fields an average of 14,000 calls reporting some level of domestic conflict that don't result in charges being laid – and in many cases, these are repeat calls for service.

The HomeFront team of partners realized they could no longer wait for tragedy to strike, or wait for people to seek the help they needed. Recognizing a gap, Calgary Police Service (CPS), Calgary and Area Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA) and HomeFront devised a plan to work together to reach these families directly, in their homes, within three days of a domestic violence call made to police.

Today, the Domestic Conflict Response Team proactively contacts individuals and families impacted by domestic conflict once they have come to the attention of the police or family services. The pilot project incorporated major components of HomeFront's successful Early Intervention & Outreach (EI&O) model – based on resiliency rather than deficiency – to intervene and educate families in crisis.

The Domestic Conflict Response Team is a seamless, integrated response that interrupts patterns of abuse and violence in families through quick and compassionate action.

Initial small-sample statistics are very encouraging: 100 percent of clients surveyed say there have been no new incidents of domestic conflict at least six months post intervention, while one year following the intervention, 76 percent of clients had no further incidents reported.

Why They Won

- The collaboration between organizations that differ from one another in structure and function is inspiring. This is a partnership between complementary, not duplicating, agencies. Also, their identification of the problem that led them to sit down to solve it together as a community was a great process for any organization to follow.
- Early successes in outcomes for the program are positive and the potential for scalability is promising. In addition, their plan to actively share their research across the province and country is impressive.
- This project has been successful in bringing complex systems together (police, justice, children's services) to develop a proactive, early intervention approach to a serious social issue. Although the program is relatively new, early results are promising and an evaluation is in place to share project learnings.



Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology

CAWST, the Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology, is a Canadian nonprofit charity established in 2001 with clients across the Americas and around the world. CAWST specializes in providing training and consulting services to governments and local and international NGOs that deliver water and sanitation services.



The Innovation

The lack of access to water and sanitation globally kills more people each year than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. Millions of people die or get sick every year from preventable diarrheal diseases. Almost 10 percent of disease and 28 percent of all child deaths can be prevented by improving water supply, sanitation, hygiene and management of water resources. At the centre of the global water crisis is inadequate sanitation, which affects 2.6 billion people, or 76 times the population of Canada. Changing the deteriorating water quality and water availability globally requires action and water education at the household level. It requires each and every person – including concerned Canadians – to act.

The Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (CAWST) seeks to address these global water and sanitation issues. CAWST provides training and consulting services and is a centre of expertise in water, sanitation and hygiene for those that serve the poor in developing countries. Their model is innovative in four ways:

- As a nonprofit engineering consultancy, CAWST is a hybrid organization that marries a clear humanitarian purpose with a disciplined business approach.
- CAWST believes that training trumps taps when it comes to lasting improvements to water and sanitation issues.

CAWST's community training programs motivate clients to take action with the knowledge and skills they acquire.

- CAWST's scalable, viral model is designed to achieve widespread impact. CAWST delivers its services through a network of local and national organizations throughout the developing world. Their education materials are freely available and designed to be adapted to the local context by on-the-ground organizations.
- CAWST's interventions are both proactive and lasting. CAWST directs its services to reach those most in need, going to the

communities and countries that request its services and providing ongoing training support as required.

Since its formation in 2001, CAWST has reached 3.6 million people in 66 countries with better water and sanitation.

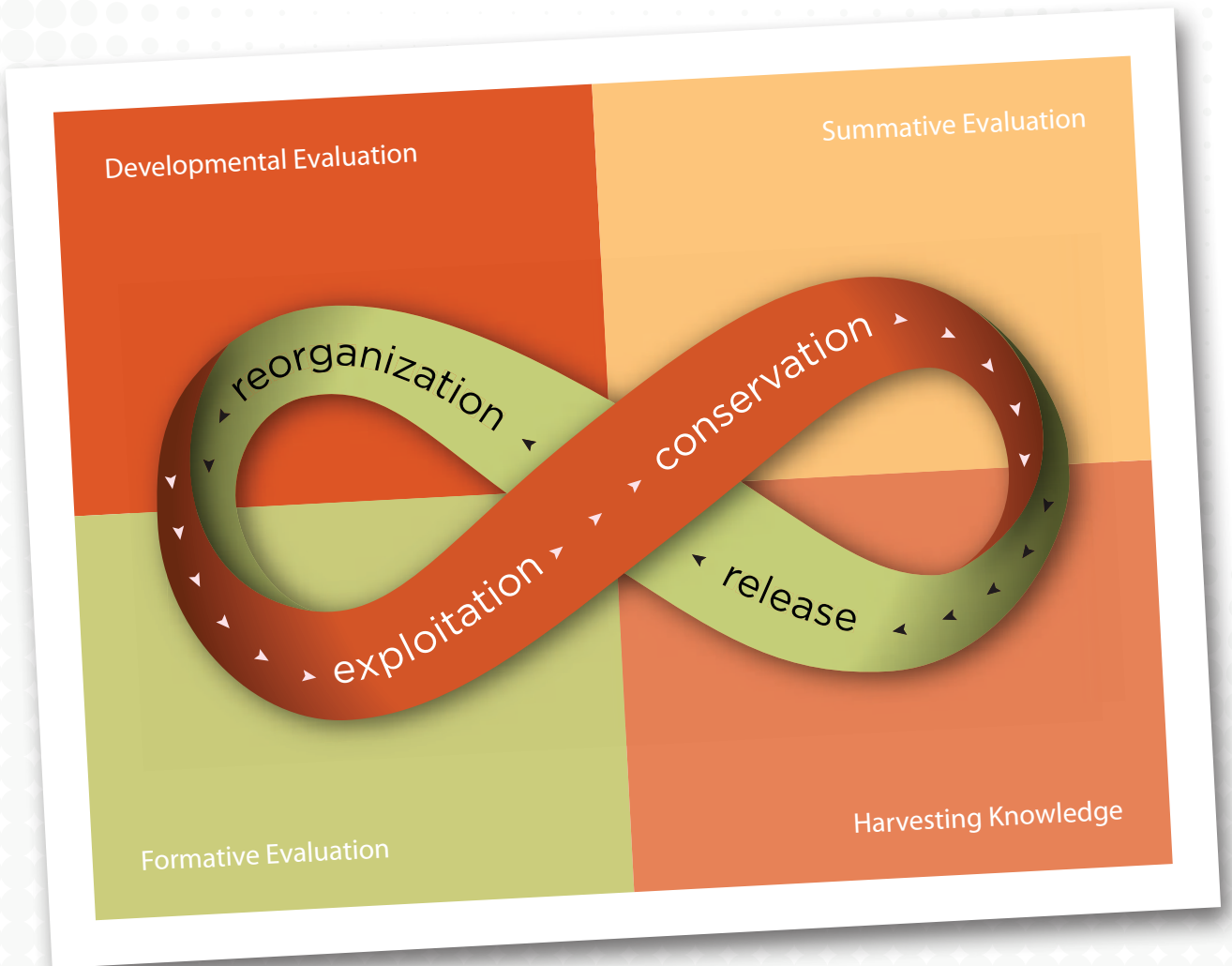
The heart of their work is educating and training on low-cost appropriate technologies such as household water treatment, rainwater harvesting and simple latrines. This includes training on the biosand filter, a household filter, which was designed here in Calgary to treat water. The technologies are either simple enough to be made in country or readily available.

CAWST's target is to reach 20 million people by 2020 with better water and sanitation. CAWST trains and "walks beside" more than 300 organizations including government agencies and local and international NGOs of all sizes as they develop their capacities to deliver water and sanitation programs.

Why They Won

- This remarkable program took a technological innovation – the biosand filter – and helped improve lives. They developed the training and consulting services needed to distribute this technology globally for humanitarian purposes, and expanded these services to an entire suite of water and sanitation topics and technologies to help communities provide themselves with better water and sanitation. The impact around the world has been extraordinary.
- There are many innovations here – the community focused education provided, the network of local and national organizations and governments through which it is provided, and the free exchange of knowledge and expertise.

CAWST's vision is a world where people have the opportunity to succeed because their basic water and sanitation needs have been met.



Holling, et al, 2002

Momentum: Developing Productive Futures

Momentum provides a broad range of programs and services designed to help people in or at risk of poverty move forward in their efforts to achieve economic self-sufficiency. In 2009, Momentum offered 17 Community Economic Development programs and employed 40 staff. Toward the goal of sustained poverty reduction, Momentum works with a wide array of partners including the underemployed, business, government and other nonprofit organizations.

The Innovation

Our society is big on completing a task against all odds. It's a recurring theme in movies, songs, and even children's books. "I think I can, I think I can," and other such phrases are part of our social memory. But what about those times when never giving up isn't the best course of action? Sometimes stopping takes more courage than pushing forward.

Such was the case for Momentum. They took a long hard look at two of their programs – the Rent Bank and the Social Purchasing Portal (SPP) – and found that they just weren't right for right now, for a number of reasons. The Rent Bank made loans to people at risk of being evicted (and there were a lot of people in this category during the affordable housing crunch of 2005). The SPP (or the Little Portal That Couldn't) connected socially responsible purchasers and sellers so they could do business with each other.

Some neat stuff was happening in both programs, but beyond Momentum's doors, things were changing. The demand was different. Rents went up, consumer debt increased, and the government started a grant program to help hard working Albertans who struggled to meet their rent payments. Most Albertans preferred the grants to Momentum's loans, and fewer people were appropriate for the Rent Bank. In the world of business, commercial purchasing portals were becoming more sophisticated, and the Social Purchasing Portal really couldn't compete.

Inside all the confusion, it was hard to know where to turn, and Momentum was naturally afraid of failure. Stopping an activity felt like a conflict with Momentum's commitment to sustainability. So Momentum decided to think differently. It looked at the whole situation, and did some reflection. It was such a busy time. Momentum's other products were busy. Demand was up 70 percent. Why wasn't there much interest in Rent Bank or SPP? Momentum really wanted to be the stable player that people could rely upon. After reflecting, Momentum decided that from another perspective, the two struggling programs were actually challenging Momentum's sustainability, not contributing to it. This was a big revelation and gave it the impetus needed to make a change. Momentum didn't make the decision on its own—in both cases, people from the community had a say.

With the Rent Bank closed up, Momentum created a space for ideas to grow. A new program called Money Coaching helps individuals understand the importance of getting out of debt, and plan steps toward making progress with their own money. It is in part what Rent Bank hoped to accomplish, but using a different approach to achieve a similar end. This innovative product may not work, but it is worth the try. Momentum wouldn't have been able to act on what the community said without freeing up needed resources.

On the SPP side, a change was also needed. Momentum contacted the other portal programs in the country, letting them know about its decision and some of the key learnings. Since then, many other portals have used Momentum's research to support their own strategic decisions.

Momentum could have quietly shut the doors of both programs and avoided any spotlight on the perceived failure. Instead, it announced its intentions and shared the reasons as widely as possible. Momentum knows that not everything they try will work out in the end, and they're okay with that.

Why They Won

- The organization is prepared to tell their stories of failure; the agency attempted somewhat high-risk programs in the first place and involved stakeholders in the closing of the programs. Stories of non-success are very important for the rest of the community to hear.
- This story of 'failure' is told in a creative way and addresses a number of issues that all nonprofits need to wrestle with – fear of failure; duplication; moving resources to meet real demands elsewhere- while at the same time acknowledging that failure creates space for new ideas.
- We learn as much from projects that don't work as those that do, but organizations (and funders!) are often reluctant to share these learnings. Momentum makes an important contribution to the sector by freely sharing its reflections and knowledge about programs that did not turn out as expected. These were courageous decisions – to shut down the programs and to be frank with the community about why they did so.



Art à la Carte

Framing Hope for Cancer

For over 17 years, Art à la Carte has provided artwork to acute care hospitalized cancer patients to promote healing and wellbeing. Through personal choice and visits by compassionate volunteers, thousands of patients, staff and visitors are nourished and comforted by the positioning of artwork in treatment areas, at the bedside and along hospital corridors.



The Innovation

One woman, inspired to make a difference in her friend's final days of life, has set in motion a healing arts movement in Calgary. Her goal was simply to give her friend choice in the artwork that adorned her hospital walls, in a situation where control and choice are in short supply for those undergoing treatment or in palliative care.

From this one experience, Art à la Carte was born. An initial collection of 75 art pieces has grown to 500. And the art isn't just in hospital rooms, nor is it just found on walls. It is in corridors and treatment areas and even reaches to the sky. Complex technology and construction gymnastics were needed to install SkyCeilings™ in active treatment areas, replicating the effect of an overhead window featuring bright blue skies and beautiful tree branches. Overcoming challenges – maintaining a sterile environment, covering insurance costs and even theft – to showcase art in a public medical facility required fortitude and creative solutions.

Art may not cure cancer, but it can soothe the soul, distract from pain, and remind patients of their humanity. When volunteers help patients select the art that appeals to them, hope and joy can thrive even in the face of terminal illness.

Art à la Carte has learned a lot along its journey. Art can be the catalyst for human connection and healing. Through community collaboration the difficulties in gaining visibility for a small, all volunteer organization, competing with larger players in the cancer network, can be overcome.

Why They Won

- This project is compelling. It resulted in significant benefit to clients; it was a small innovation with large impact; it involved more than one organization and has become a prototype for other programs.
- Transforming the sterile hospital environment into a warmer, more comforting place results in significant benefit to patients. It was no small feat to convince the health care system to let patients add art to hospital rooms.
- This was out of the box thinking to bring beauty to cancer wards and it has high potential to go broader.
- Art à la Carte was viral in terms of its growth - it began with 75 pieces of art, and now has 500. Art à la Carte is available in Alberta and Ontario and is becoming more popular as a way to provide hope and joy to ill patients.

Acknowledgements

We believe that a critical step in growing a culture of innovative practice is sharing the experiences of organizations which have undertaken (or are undertaking) some element of innovative practice. The Calgary Nonprofit Innovation Awards recipients will share their stories to allow others to incorporate aspects of innovative practices in their own organizations.

CCVO thanks the Project Advisory Committee for their contributions to this work:

- Michelle Clarke Burns Memorial Fund
- Carlo Jensen Uniscan Consulting Inc.
- Karina Campbell The Mustard Seed
- Erin Sharp STARS Foundation
- Sharilyn Amy Go-To Group, Inc.
- Sue Phillips Further Education Society
- Janet Lavoie City of Calgary
- Mike Grogan Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations

About the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations

The Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations gives voice to the nonprofit and voluntary sector. CCVO's insight and leadership generate results for the sector to be able to thrive and contribute to strong, healthy communities. CCVO promotes and strengthens the nonprofit and voluntary sector by developing and sharing resources and knowledge, building connections, leading collaborative work, and giving voice to critical issues affecting the sector.

For more information, visit www.calgarycvo.org.

About the Canadian Nonprofit Innovators' Network

The Canadian Nonprofit Innovators' Network brings people and organizations together to develop and share innovative practices in the nonprofit sector. The Innovators' Network does this through an interactive website that links people, ideas and tools; an annual forum to showcase and learn about innovations; and through the development and support of regional Innovation Nodes that animate innovative ideas and practices in their regions.

For more information, visit www.sparkinginnovation.ca.

“If you want to be incrementally better: Be competitive. If you want to be exponentially better: Be cooperative.”

- Author Unknown

Funding support for this project has been provided by the Government of Canada.

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